Query: Please provide an annotated bibliography about approaches, outcomes and impacts of initiatives that aim to reduce violence against women and are linked to increased political engagement.

Enquirer: DFID Pakistan

1. Overview
2. VAW and political engagement/empowerment
3. Case studies
4. Additional information

1. Overview

The link between violence against women (VAW) and women’s political engagement is a complex one, deeply rooted in patriarchal systems of gender relations. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW, Yakın Ertürk, violence is a “disempowering force, which erodes women’s self dignity, their capabilities and ability to enjoy the full spectrum of their human rights” (2009, p.1), including their ability to participate in public life and politics.

In the literature consulted for this query, convincing arguments are made about the connection between VAW and women’s engagement in political processes (see Section 2). The link between VAW and women’s under-representation in politics is mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, violence impacts upon women’s physical, psychological and emotional health, limiting their ability to get involved in politics. For example, the fear of violence has had a psychological effect of restricting women’s participation in Afghanistan, not only in politics, but in other areas of public life – journalists, teachers, development workers, health workers etc. UNAMA/OHCHR report that “the pattern of attacks against women operating in the public sphere sends a strong message to all women to stay at home ... The effective imprisonment of women in their homes in an electoral period raises additional concerns.” (2009, p.2)

But, conversely, research shows that “women’s isolation from public and community life can contribute to increased violence. Women who become more involved in community groups and social networks decrease their vulnerability; they get support and access practical solutions such as legal protection, counselling and advice. But we have also observed that

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1 See table on page 5 of this query for a summary of the different types of violence against women in politics.
violence against women can actually increase when women start to play a greater role in
decision-making, because of the ensuing shift in the power dynamics, which the perpetrators
of violence perceive as a threat to their own status" (WOMANKIND, 2008, p.12).

ActionAid argue that the relationship between VAW and governance needs to be addressed,
because VAW is a “governance failure”, as is the under-representation of women in politics.
The two issues are linked and a recent report by the organization concludes that
“governments would do well to recognise how the two issues are linked: violence against
women acts as a structural barrier to women’s participation in politics and public life. Indeed
women are often placed at increased risk of violence the further they move into public life and
politics. The relationship between the two needs to be tackled for either to make any
progress.” (ActionAid, 2010, p.40)

Evidence on the link between VAW and political engagement
As yet, there is little evidence available to substantiate the link between VAW and women’s
political engagement. Dina Deligiorgis (Knowledge Management Specialist for the Ending
Violence against Women team at UN Women), has observed that there are very few rigorous
evaluations on VAW with respect to any topic, and little to none that look specifically at the
impact on political engagement (see Appendix).

Data collection on VAW and women’s political engagement has, thus far, been inconsistent
and unreliable, making it difficult to measure progress. Ertürk, the UN Special Rapporteur,
notes that data gaps on VAW have long been a problem, with no agreed benchmarks for
measuring progress over time at the international level. In a recent report by ActionAid, the
authors argue that there is an ‘accountability gap’, because virtually all countries do not
recognise VAW as a governance concern, despite its prevalence. The World Bank does not
include VAW in its major project on governance indicators and even the indicator – ‘absence
of violence’ – does not look at VAW, but rather limits the issue to those acts that could
destabilise the government.

However, the outlook seems more promising, with the United Nations Security Council
reporting in April 2010 to the Secretary General on the role of indicators in monitoring
implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Once the
proposed indicators become operational, they should provide a valuable database for
assessing progress on reducing VAW and the impact on women’s political participation. The
indicators proposed by the United Nations which are relevant to this query are:

- **Indicator 1: Incidence of sexual violence** The data needed would be collected using
  surveys and could be disaggregated by types of sexual violence as well as the sub-
groups of population among which violence occurs.

- **Indicator 12: Level of women’s political participation** Includes five components: the
  percentages of women who are registered to vote; those who actually vote; those who
  are parliamentary candidates; those actually in parliaments; and those in ministerial
  positions.

- **Indicator 14: Index of women’s and girls’ physical security** Data on this indicator
  will be collected through consistent, replicable and ethical surveys. Proxy variables
  could be considered in measuring how the ability of women and girls to participate in
  public life has been affected by conflict.

However, it should be noted that measuring reduction in VAW and drawing conclusions from
the data is challenging. One of the experts consulted, Sharon Smee (Women’s Rights
Adviser, ActionAid UK), noted that, “an increase in reporting of sexual violence may indicate
that women feel safer reporting, rather than an increase in violence itself. So an increase in
the reporting of sexual violence may actually indicate greater empowerment / political engagement.”

Similarly, it should not be taken for granted that increases in female politicians necessarily lead to meaningful change in women’s lives, although most studies show that more women in politics/decision-making leads to a greater focus on specific priorities for women, such as addressing VAW more comprehensively and effectively. For example, in Rwanda, where the number of women MPs is the largest in the world, the high levels of women’s representation has led to a concrete and notable policy outcome: the new Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence. This law provides a legal definition of rape for adult women, defines marital rape as a gender-based crime, and sets out punishment for offenders.

It is therefore important to use mixed methodologies to examine the impact of initiatives that aim to reduce VAW. Qualitative methodologies can help uncover the reasons behind changes in the incidence of sexual violence or women’s physical security, as well as the reasons behind increased political engagement. Interviews, group discussions and exercises can explore, for example, whether increases in women’s political participation are due to long-term changes or are instead a response to external pressure or temporary changes in election systems and policies. The results of some of these approaches are presented in this query.

Case studies

The query uncovered a few small-scale, anecdotal, examples of how approaches to reduce VAW are making a difference to women’s political engagement and empowerment. For example, a CARE project in Bangladesh aimed to reduce VAW by strengthening civil society and empowering communities in Dinaipur as part of a Partnership for Healthy Life Project (PHL). An assessment of the project’s impact was done using group discussions, individual interviews and a project assessment exercise. The impact findings in relation to political empowerment and engagement included increases in women’s participation in community forums, and changes in attitudes, gender/social relations and structures. Nevertheless, the report concludes that projects need to ensure the representation and composition of VAW initiatives to ensure they do not reinforce exclusion. Another lesson is to ensure that projects link with women’s groups to reach and strengthen the agency of women and build their confidence.

The other project indicators examined currently measure ‘outputs’. For example, the ‘We Can’ campaign to end domestic violence in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan has consisted of several VAW awareness-raising activities. The campaign’s progress reports outline the achievements in terms of outputs, for example, the number of people who received awareness-raising messages, or the number of people trained. However, to date, the impact findings are not yet available, so it is not possible to say what impact these initiatives have had on women’s political engagement.
2. VAW and Political Engagement/Empowerment


This WOMANKIND Worldwide report on the structural and social barriers to women’s political participation uses recent examples from around the world. It notes that the link between VAW and working to promote women’s political participation is a complex one, working in both directions. On the one hand, violence takes a toll on women’s physical, psychological and emotional health, limiting their ability to get involved in politics or participate in community meetings. But, conversely, WOMANKIND’s research shows that “women’s isolation from public and community life can contribute to increased violence. Women who become more involved in community groups and social networks decrease their vulnerability; they get support and access practical solutions such as legal protection, counselling and advice. But we have also observed that violence against women can actually increase when women start to play a greater role in decision-making, because of the ensuing shift in the power dynamics, which the perpetrators of violence perceive as a threat to their own status” (p.12)

http://www.iknowpolitics.org/files/Consolidated%20reply%20violence%20against%20women%20in%20politics_.pdf

This document shows the consolidated reply of members of the iKNOW politics network of their experiences and perceptions of violence against women in politics from around the world, including examples from Kenya, Ecuador, Sweden Iraq, Southeast Asia and South Eastern Europe. The participants discussed the different forms of violence, from physical to psychological. Violence against women in politics is deeply rooted in society, with root causes including: “persisting cultural stereotypes, abuse of religious and traditional practices, patriarchal societal structures in which economic, political and social power are dominated by men, and the role women have historically played as the followers of male political leaders” (p.2).

The following measures were suggested during the e-discussion to reduce violence against women in politics:

- Interest-based solidarity groups between women
- Parallel women’s electoral campaigns
- Free advice on issues related to human rights and human development
- Collect data on harassment and violence of women
- Lobby for legislation against harassment and political violence based on gender
- Quotas for women at all levels of political, policy and decision-making processes
- Measures to ensure the physical security of women in politics
- Training of election monitors and placing monitors in all constituencies where there are women candidates
- Creating awareness of Security Council Resolution 1325 at the grassroots level
This report by South Asia Partnership International looks at violence against women in politics (VAWIP). VAWIP refers to the many forms of violence which women face, including rape, misbehaviour, physical abuse and character assassination targeting female candidates, political representatives and voters. The report notes that violence can discourage women from participating in politics and this violence occurs at many different locations (public/private) and at societal structures (family/society/political spheres) – see table below.

Table Summarising the Landscape of Violence against Women in Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Violence</th>
<th>Place of its Occurrence</th>
<th>Types of Victims</th>
<th>Types of Perpetrators</th>
<th>Aims of Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical: Murder, beating, throwing acid</td>
<td>Grassroots level, home, societal and political level</td>
<td>Influential women leaders, women activists</td>
<td>Opposition parties, own parties, extremist religious organisations, fatwabaj</td>
<td>Win inter and intra party war, maintain status quo role of women in society, satisfy patriarchal insecurities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual: rape, sexual exploitation, harassment</td>
<td>Situations of armed conflict, at the political level</td>
<td>Activist women</td>
<td>Security forces, warring forces, male politicians</td>
<td>To deter political mobilization of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological: slander and character assassination, insults, equating women politicians’ character with dirty games and hunger for power, denial of rightful office</td>
<td>Political Level: Electoral process – during nominations and election campaigns; Organisation or State Level: In office, parliament, family</td>
<td>Young women aspiring to a political career, active women leaders and family, established women politicians</td>
<td>Opposition parties or members of own parties, male superiors</td>
<td>To deter women politicians from getting tickets from parties and from winning elections, to stop women leaders from active and rightful fulfilment of their duty, to satisfy jealousy, male ego and own weaknesses, to manipulate and maintain male authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats and Coercion: conspiracy against women leaders, female relatives in political office, trauma, torture and harassment, ridicule and accusations by male politicians directed at women politicians, biased decisions against women politicians when males face accusations of misconduct</td>
<td>Parliament, police stations, councils, party organisations, committees, home, office</td>
<td>Established women politicians, women in positions of political authority, including her team and family, panchayats and council leaders at grassroots level</td>
<td>Party men, police men, subordinate staff, male colleagues, family members</td>
<td>Deter and overthrow women politicians exercising power and control, revenge, settling of vendettas, stop from contesting elections and joining political office, to frustrate ambitious and committed women politicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The report also provides short case-studies on violence against women in politics from: Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Sweden; Kenya; the Philippines; Cambodia; Bangladesh; India; and Nepal. The report concludes that violence affects women from making an effective contribution in the political arena and “Attempting to effectively combat the issue of VAWIP requires a consolidated, concerted and systematic lobbying strategy and advocacy campaign
instituted by civil society actors to ensure that the issue is firmly placed on the public agenda” (p.24). CEDAW is identifies as a useful lobbying strategy to help countries design and implement mechanisms to promote women’s involvement in politics and protect them from violence.

[See also: http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/1325plus10/materials/]

This document examines women’s participation in community-based peacebuilding initiatives and is based on six countries: Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda. It looks at the different challenges women face to participation at the community level, such as exclusion from male-dominated decision-making forums, lack of funding, exclusion from formal peacebuilding processes, resistance to initiatives that challenge cultural traditions, and security risks. The report highlights some successful strategies to encourage participation, for example coalition-building, promoting the use of digital technologies and new funding mechanisms, and efforts that combine traditional and modern conflict resolution approaches and strive to facilitate women’s participation in local decision-making processes.

Ertürk, Y., 2008, ‘Violence against Women: From Victimization to Empowerment’

This paper by Yakın Ertürk, the U. N. Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, looks at the link between VAW and empowerment. The author notes that the link is ‘intricate”: “VAW disempowers women, destroys their self confidence and self worth thus diminishing their ability to resist and live their full potential. Therefore, it is only through empowering strategies – individually and collectively – can women’s resistance to abuse be enhanced not only to cope with oppression on a daily basis but more importantly to overcome disempowering forces and transform gender hierarchies” (p.9). The paper argues that reduction of VAW requires “approaching the problem within an empowerment rather than a victimization framework” (p.9).

The UN Special Rapporteur notes there has long been a problem of data gaps on VAW, with no agreed indicators or benchmarks for measuring progress over time at the international level. She notes that this problem is currently being addressed, with VAW indicators being developed.


This guidebook provides information on how to develop and implement a surveillance system to monitor, document, communicate, refer and advocate against violence against women in politics (VAWIP). It is intended for use of stakeholders of the system, run by the South Asia Partnership, a regional network of organizations working at the grassroots in five countries of South Asia (Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India). The South Asia Partnership is mandated to work for peace, livelihood, and good governance.
This UNIFEM report examines the issue of gender and accountability, asking the question ‘Who answers to women?’ Violence against women is a recurrent issue throughout the report but building national accountability to address VAW requires reliable data to be collected and made public. The report notes that “Information is central to informed policy and program development and monitoring. This includes population-based surveys on the multiple manifestations of violence against women and girls, their prevalence, causes, consequences, and the impact of interventions over the medium to longer-term; service-level data to assess sector performance (health, judicial and security); and surveys on attitudes and behaviours. The task of building data on VAW is made more challenging by the fact that VAW is one of the least reported crimes” (p.10).

Chapter 2 looks at politics and notes that “Governments still have a long way to go to find effective means of addressing election violence and other forms of intimidation targeting women.” (p.26).


This 2010 Report of the Secretary General focuses on women, peace and security, and specifically on the role of indicators in monitoring implementation of Security Council resolution 1325. The proposed indicators which are relevant to this query are:

- **Indicator 1: Incidence of sexual violence in conflict-affected countries:** The data needed would be collected using surveys and could be disaggregated by types of sexual violence as well as the sub-groups of population among which violence occurs.

- **Indicator 12: Level of women’s political participation in conflict-affected countries:** The five components include the percentages of women who are registered to vote, those who actually vote, those who are parliamentary candidates, those actually in parliaments and those in ministerial positions.

- **Indicator 14: Index of women’s and girls’ physical security:** Data on this indicator will be collected through consistent, replicable and ethical surveys. Proxy variables could be considered in measuring how the ability of women and girls to participate in public life has been affected by conflict. Data would be disaggregated by relevant vulnerable groups including internally displaced populations, indigenous peoples, and rural or urban residence.

At present, data collection on these indicators is sporadic, but once the proposed indicators become operational, they would provide a valuable database for assessing progress on reducing violence against women and women’s political empowerment.


The 2010 edition of The State of World Population report looks at how women are faring ten years after the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 2315 on women, peace and
security. The report is based on interviews and reporting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, Jordan, Liberia, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank), Timor-Leste and Uganda.

Chapter 3 - ‘Women on the front lines of recovery’ – explores women’s influence in Liberia during the post-conflict recovery period. It looks at how women have been central to the peace movement and reducing VAW, and highlights the role of organisations such as Mano River Women’s Peace Network and Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness (THINK). Page 30 includes a box on increasing female registration and voting in Liberia, so that women became 51% of the electorate - ‘The Making of a Minister of Gender and Development’.


This International Alert paper examines women’s political participation in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The author highlights the realities and complexities of women’s political empowerment and the link with violence. The paper observes that increases in female representation may be due to external pressure or temporary changes to election systems and policies, and warns that an increase in female politicians does not necessarily lead to meaningful change to women’s lives, without the political will or capacity to enact women-friendly legislation. Kellow argues that “we need to look behind the numbers and the headlines to assess the true nature and effectiveness of women’s political participation, how much they are able to take advantage of greater opportunities, and to measure how severe are the lingering obstacles they encounter.” (p.9)

The paper draws on local views to qualitatively analyse what factors encourage women’s participation, for example a strong civil society, decentralisation and in the case of Liberia, the inspiration of a female president. The paper also identifies factors constraining women’s engagement in the political process, including violence and fear of violence. The author concludes that while women’s political participation is improving in both countries, “the inability of state institutions to confront political violence and intimidation could deter some women from participating in the 2012 elections. Exaggerated fears of violence created by poor reporting that obscures the facts and is insensitive about past incidents can also serve as a barrier to women’s political participation.” (p.6)


This ActionAid report looks at VAW and its impact on development. The authors note that violence undermines women’s ability to use their skills to bring about changes in their community and participate in public life, because they are fearful of their safety and unable to take advantage of opportunities to make a difference. Chapter 5 concentrates on the link between VAW and governance. It highlights the problem of women sometimes being a specific target for violence when they increase their participation in public life and politics, as candidates, as politicians, as women’s rights advocates and as voters during elections. Examples from Malawi, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Bolivia and Rwanda are given.

The report argues that there is a ‘major accountability gap’ in terms of the poor response by most states to VAW and the lack of access to justice for survivors. It notes that “virtually all countries are ill-equipped even to track the accountability gap because they do not recognise violence against women, despite its prevalence, as a governance concern” (p.38). The authors note that the World Bank does not include VAW in its major project on governance
indicators and even the indicator - ‘absence of violence’ – does not look at VAW, but rather limits the issue to those acts that could destabilise the government,

The authors argue that the relationship between VAW and governance needs to be addressed, because VAW is a “governance failure”, as is the under-representation of women in politics. The two issues are linked and the report concludes that “governments would do well to recognise how the two issues are linked: violence against women acts as a structural barrier to women’s participation in politics and public life. Indeed women are often placed at increased risk of violence the further they move into public life and politics. The relationship between the two needs to be tackled for either to make any progress.” (p.40)


This article examines whether increases in women’s representation in parliament leads to a different style of parliamentary politics and policy outputs, using the case of Rwanda which has the highest level of women’s parliamentary representation in the world at 48.75%. The authors interviewed women representatives in the Rwandan parliament and found that the women considered themselves to have a “greater concern with grassroots politics”. This concern manifested itself in women’s issues being raised more easily and often than before, but it did not necessarily translate to policy outputs. Most of the significant women-friendly laws, such as the Category One status for rape, the inheritance law and the Constitution, were passed before the large increase in women’s representation in parliament. The most noticeable exception is the new Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence. This law provides a legal definition of rape for adult women, defines marital rape as a gender-based crime, and sets out punishment for offenders.

3. Case Studies

WE CAN Alliance to End Domestic Violence
[http://www.wecanendvaw.org]

The ‘We Can’ campaign, running in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, aims to raise people's awareness of domestic violence, to help raise women’s voice and actively contribute to stopping all forms of violence against women. A comprehensive assessment process has begun to assess this process of change, starting in India and Bangladesh, before moving on to Nepal and Sri Lanka in 2008. Findings from the Bangladesh We Can campaign annual report in 2009 listed the following achievements:

- Increased reporting on Domestic Violence (DV) in the media
- Involvement of alliance members in CEDAW committee and Beijing +5 committee
- ‘We Can’ actively participated in the formulation of the Domestic Violence Act for the government of Bangladesh.
- Dissemination of basic messages of ‘We Can’ campaign to 15 million people in 2009 through regular social mobilisation programmes by partners & alliances, campaign events and materials, radio and TV channels

[http://www.wecanendvaw.org/sites/default/files/We%20Can%20Campaign%20Bangladesh-Annual%20Report%202009_0.pdf]
http://www.carebd.org/publication/Publication_6641020.pdf

This summary report looks at the main findings, recommendations and implications arising out of a CARE project in Bangladesh that focused on the VAW initiative of the Partnership for Healthy Life Project (PHL). The project aimed to reduce VAW by strengthening civil society and empowering communities in Dinaipur, for example by activating the Upazilla VAW Coordination Committee and engaging local community leaders in dialogue about violence against women. The project also coordinated, provided leadership and support through Union Parishads (UPs) at the union level, holding workshops with up to 100 people including local officials, elected representatives, religious and other leaders, NGO and community based organisation representatives, lawyers, journalists, youth and adolescent representatives and a cross-section of the population as a whole. Other activities helped to raise awareness, stimulate dialogue and change the way in which informal and formal institutions and services work.

An examination of project impact was done using group discussions, individual interviews and a project assessment exercise. The impact findings in relation to political empowerment and engagement were:

- **Changing Attitudes and Gender/Social Relations: Impacts at the Village Level.** Participation and impact differs according to wealth, age and religion. In Kanpur, the project brought about positive changes in VAW and related issues like early marriage and polygamy. The report also notes that there is “a long way to go in improving the process - giving women a voice in decision-making - and [women] were aware that it remains difficult for poor women to obtain justice. However, space for women has been created in these previously completely male-dominated arenas.” (p.6)

- **Changing Structures And Relations: Village Forums And Shalish.** There have been some problems of community representation, especially of poorer groups and Hindus, and ‘capture’ of one of the VAW forums by traditional power-holders in one of the locations. However, in the other location (Kanpur), the project has increased women’s participation. The Kanpur CAW Forum members described the following changes in shalish:\(^2\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before project</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some in chair and some on mats</td>
<td>Everyone sits at an equal level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People used to bargain in shalish and</td>
<td>Issues are discussed in shalish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk in with a decision made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to be dominated by 2-3 families</td>
<td>Wider interests are now represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional power-holders and others</td>
<td>Influence of older power-holders has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extorting money from shalish</td>
<td>diminished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited women’s participation in shalish</td>
<td>Women’s participation in shalish has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>increased</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This CARE project worked mainly with village, Union and Upazilla structures, which was important in terms of changing social structures, but the report concludes that projects need to also link with women’s groups to reach and strengthen the agency of women and build their confidence. Another lesson is to ensure the representation and composition of VAW forums to ensure they do not reinforce exclusion. The author makes the following recommendations for the design of future VAW projects:

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\(^2\) Shalish refers to the traditional practice of informal arbitration of community disputes at the village or union level usually presided over by local elites
- Power net analysis to understand the elite groups, their links to politics and their likely influence on project activities.
- A rapid social and institutional mapping of the context to understand the relationship between existing groups and organizations at different geographical levels.
- A deeper analysis of individual cases of VAW and how they are resolved or not resolved by at the local level, taking into account wealth levels, religion, location and linkages with elite groups.
- A stronger emphasis on the views of women affected by violence.

‘Bihar Election: Women's Mandate’, NDTV, November 18 2010
http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/bihar-election-women-s-mandate-67196
See also:

These news and blog stories on the November 2010 election in Bihar, an India state “notorious for its lawlessness”, report that 54% of female voters cast their votes – nearly 10% more than the last election. Overall, women voters also outnumbered men (50%) in percentage terms. The reason for the high female turnout is partly attributed (in the blogs and news reports) to the various schemes and initiatives for women and girls, particularly welfare schemes and the emphasis on school enrolment – free school dresses, midday meals, bicycles to get to school. Another reason for the high female turnout cited in the reports is the ruling coalition’s emphasis on suraksha (law and order), which has led to a decline in kidnapping and rape. The shops are now open past sunset and restaurants stay open until 11pm, with women and girls no longer living in fear. NDTV reports one female voter as saying, “We have come out to vote because we feel absolutely safe and secure. We feel we can cast our vote with some degree of independence”.

UNAMA/OHCHR, 2009, ‘Silence is Violence: End the Abuse of Women in Afghanistan’,
UNAMA/OHCHR, Kabul

This report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR focuses on the violence that deters women from participating in public life and sexual violence (particularly rape). The report finds that women in Afghanistan face an increasingly insecure environment, with prominent Afghan women (and their families) facing threats, harassments, attacks and even death. The fear of violence also has a psychological effect of restricting participation, not only in politics, but in other areas of public life – journalists, teachers, development workers, health workers etc.

The report concludes that the “the pattern of attacks against women operating in the public sphere sends a strong message to all women to stay at home ... The effective imprisonment of women in their homes in an electoral period raises additional concerns.” (p.2) Women face intimidation and threats from the armed opposition, including the Taliban, but also from religious leaders, village mullahs and even their own families. UNAMA and OCHCR recommend that the Afghan government, as well as other stakeholders, should:

- Publicly and explicitly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls;
- Define and criminalise rape in Afghan law;
- Put in place measures that build an enabling environment and cultural ethic that inhibits rape and holds perpetrators to account and allow women to play an active role within their families, communities and Afghan society in general;
- Promote "affirmative action" measures to redress gender imbalance in society and in
particular in the work place; and,

- Promote the participation of women in all decision-making processes that affect their lives and Afghan society, including with respect to peace-building and reconciliation efforts.

4. Additional information

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This query response was prepared by Erika Fraser. For further information please contact Emma Broadbent (emma@sddirect.org.uk).

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Websites visited

Google, GSDRC, UNIFEM, UN Women, World Bank, ActionAid, OneWorld Action, iKNOW Politics, Rozan, Violence against Women in Politics (VAWIP), Aurat Foundation, South Asia Partnership, INTRAC, NDTV, WOMANKIND Worldwide, UN Security Council, International Alert, UNFPA, WE CAN Alliance to End Domestic Violence, CARE Bangladesh, UNAMA, OHCHR

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